

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Favorable consideration of this application is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-4 and 8-15 are presently active in this application. Claims 8-15 have been withdrawn from consideration. Claim 1 has been amended based upon the disclosure found at page 34, lines 18-22 (for minimum current value of 500mA) and Fig. 14 (showing maximum current value 1A) for example. Clearly, Claim 1 has been amended without the introduction of any new matter.

The outstanding Action presents a rejection of Claims 1 and 2 as being anticipated by Okubo (U.S. Patent No. 6,529,011) and the rejection of Claims 1-4 as anticipated by Okubo under 35 U.S.C. §102(e). These rejections differ slightly with respect to Claims 1 and 2 based upon slight differences in the portions of Okubo in relied upon.

As noted in the previous response, the stopping of the voltage being applied across the at least one probe and the inspection electrode when a current flowing between the at least one probe and the inspection electrode reaches a reference value is advantageous in several respects. For example, it helps protect the tip portion of the at least one probe, the target object, and the contact portion formed by the at least one probe tip portion and the electrode of the target object from being damaged due to excessive current flow damage that can occur from a current surge when the insulating film is broken. The fritting process time can further be reduced as there is a positive stopping of the fritting voltage due to the presence of a current flow indicating the breaking of the insulating film which permits the changeover to inspection at the earliest possible time. The present Amendment clarifies that this reference value for current is set between 500mA and 1A.

The rejection of Claims 1 and 2 as being anticipated by Okubo and the rejection of Claims 1-4 as being anticipated by Okubo rely upon the same disclosure of Okubo as col. 4, line 1-4 as to the recital of Claim 1 requiring “stopping a voltage from being applied across the at least one probe and the inspection electrode when a current flowing between the at least one probe and the inspection electrode reaches a reference value.” This portion of Claim 1 has been amended to clarify that the reference value of current is from 500mA to 1A.

This reference value prevents heating of the contact portion between at least one probe and inspection electrode due to the fact that the current can be no higher than 1A. The 500mA value ensures the removal of unwanted material. Accordingly, and as noted above, setting the reference current value produces advantageous results. Turning to Okubo, it is clear that this reference contains no teaching of setting any particular reference value for the current, much less the presently claimed reference value of 500mA-1A.

In addition, while Claims 7, 12, and 16 of Okubo considered with col. 6, lines 7-8 and Fig. 5 suggest a sensing circuit that would detect when contact is established between “said terminal and said external electrodes,” there is no suggestion that any particular reference value of current is associated with this sensing, much less the now claimed reference value of 500mA-1A.

Accordingly, as Okubo fails to teach or suggest the presently claimed reference value of current of 500mA-1A it is clear that the present anticipation rejections applied as to Claim 1 cannot be maintained and should be withdrawn.

As Claims 2-4 all ultimately depend from Claim 1 and include all the limitations thereof, the subject matter of these dependent claims also cannot be said to be reasonably taught or suggested by Okubo.

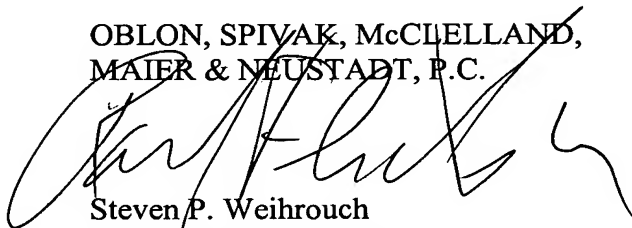
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Accordingly, the withdrawal of the rejection of Claim 2 and the rejection Claims 2-4 as being anticipated by Okubo is also respectfully submitted to be in order.

As no further issues are believed outstanding in the present application, it is believed to be clearly in condition for formal allowance. Accordingly, an early and favorable action to that effect is therefore earnestly and respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Steven P. Weihrouch, is written over the printed name and firm name.

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